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UNCLAS SAN JOSE 000434

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SUBJECT: ARIAS WINS FINAL COUNT FOR PRESIDENCY, BUT WINNER
NOT YET OFFICIALLY DECLARED

REF: SAN JOSE 410

1. The Supreme Electoral Tribunal (TSE) finished its mandatory manual recount of all votes in the presidential election at 4:00 pm on February 22. At the end of the count, Arias defeated Solis by 18,167 votes. Arias narrowly avoided a run-off election by winning 40.92 percent of the vote (40 percent is required). Solis won 39.8 percent. Complaints can be filed up to three work days after the final count and have to be resolved before the election results can be made official. Consequently, official results will not be released until at least February 27. Arias's lead could shrink slightly as the complaints are resolved and some votes are inevitably thrown out. We expect Arias to be declared the official winner sometime next week.

2. Several candidates have begun to congratulate Arias on his victory. National Unity Party (PUN) candidate (and former human rights ombudsman) Jose Manuel Echandi reminded reporters outside Arias's home that he had personally observed the entire manual recount on behalf of his party and was completely satisfied with the transparency of the outcome. Solis has stated that he will not concede until the official announcement of a winner. Arias and Solis encountered each other in public at the ordainment of the new Bishop in Limon. After an awkward moment, they rather stiffly embraced--prompting spontaneous applause from the thousands of onlookers. Arias later told reporters that he and Solis are still friends, with areas of agreement as well as their differences. With the campaign over, it was time to build on the areas where they agree.

3. Members of Solis's party have begun wearing black ribbons in protest of what they call the TSE's "lack of concern over serious anomalies." Representatives of the powerful public sector unions have threatened "street confrontations" to disrupt Arias's "illegitimate reign." Beyond this, all appears calm with Costa Ricans accepting the electoral results peacefully.

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